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Basilio de Santa Cruz Pumacallao
(Cuzco, 1635 - 1710)

*The Investiture of Saint
Ildephonsus*

oil on canvas

154 x 100 cm.; 60 5/8 x 39 3/8 in.

Provenance

Private Collection, Seville, Spain.

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In the work of Basilio de Santa Cruz Pumacallao, who was a Quechua Indian, we can observe close ties to Spanish painting. It is to this artist, and his studio, that we attribute authorship of the work we are presenting here. He was one of the most prominent painters in the Americas, and thanks to his great skill and the quality of his works he can be compared with his Spanish contemporaries. He attained an exquisite fusion of Spanish Baroque with touches of the American spirit. He interpreted the work of the great Spanish masters such as Murillo, Velázquez, Valdés Leal and the Flemish artist Rubens without forgetting his indigenous roots, giving rise to an innovative and unique result, *mestizo* style. *St. Ignatius of Loyola Exorcising the Possessed* and *The Miracles of St. Francis Xavier in the Indies* clearly draw on Rubens' artistic imagination.

At first, art historians confused his origin, taking him for a Spanish painter working in the Americas, due to his clearly Baroque style and a lack of documentary evidence, and they even speculated regarding a life in a monastery which he never had. Recent research identifies Basilio de Santa Cruz as descending from Indians, and though there is little record of his childhood or training as an artist, we do have evidence of his prolific output. At the tender age of 27 he executed his *Martyrdom of St. Laureano*, which is preserved in the Church of the Merced in the imperial city of Cuzco.

The *Martyrdom of St. Laureano* is the first known work signed by Basilio Santa Cruz, dating from 1662 and, of even greater significance, it is considered by a number of scholars to be the first Baroque work carried out in Cuzco, thereby preparing the way, with the arrival of the 18th century, for what would subsequently become one of the most interesting periods, with a style known as *Barroco Mestizo*. It was here that one could observe the most striking and powerful examples, expressed in the visual arts, of the syncretism that resulted from indigenous acculturation, including large numbers of artistic elements of pre-Hispanic nature which were passed on from generation to generation in these innovative works.

In this midst of this cultural heritage we can discern the promising figure of the young Basilio Santa Cruz, who produced a quite extraordinary artistic output focusing on religious painting and portraiture. One of the people who recognized his tenacity and talent was Laureano

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Polo de Alarcón, the director of the Hospital de San Andrés, immortalized by the artist in his *Martyrdom of St. Laureano* where he is portrayed as a donor in a breath-taking and masterful work addressed by Celso Pastor de la Torre in his publication *Perú: Fe y arte en el virreinato*.

The *Corpus Christi* housed in Cuzco Cathedral is a clear example of religious syncretism represented in Cuzco painting, combining both Christian and Andean elements. It portrays one of the most important festivities in the Viceroyalty's religious calendar, held in the month of June, coinciding with the old Incan *Inti Raymi* festival.

Few works currently known by the painter or his circle are to be found outside of the ecclesiastical world; that is to say, in private collections. Of these it is worth mentioning the *Immaculate Virgin* from the Museo de Arte in Lima, and a *St. Lawrence*, measuring 143 x 94 cm, housed at the Museo Pedro de Osma (fig. 1). Comparing it with our *Investiture of St. Ildephonsus*, we find ourselves before two canvases of similar dimensions, which also clearly present features of the Spanish baroque, combined with elements belonging to Cuzco painting.

The fine work on the ornamental drawings executed using *brocatería* (the application of gold to decorate and highlight scenes) follows exactly the same technical approach and design in the two paintings (figs. 2a and 2b). It is true that the figure of St. Lawrence is precisely drawn in a fashion that exactly parallels the three figures from the *Investiture of St. Ildephonsus*, but the little angels flying above are less exactly sketched out, with a lack of power in the brushstrokes, thereby demoting them to a secondary level within the scene.

It is certainly the case that the Basilio de Santa Cruz *Investiture of St. Ildephonsus* we have before us here denotes a clear syncretism between indigenous Cuzco and Baroque Spain. The fact that the work possesses characteristics linking it to European forms and models does not fully distance the artist from his Indo-American identity, powerfully reflected in the abundant use of gold brocade.

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Considered one of the Holy Fathers of the Spanish Church, Ildephonsus, who was apparently born in Toledo, where he became Bishop, was one of the most illustrious figures in Visigothic Spain, some of whose writings have also survived, these being a key source for his biographic documentation.

In conclusion, and in the light of the above, *The Investiture of St. Ildephonsus* has enabled us to make a major contribution to the field of research into the *Barroco Mestizo* style originating in Cuzco, as well as highlighting the figure of Basilio de Santa Cruz Pumacallao, who was one of the pillars of this key Viceroyalty artistic movement. This work stands as a clear representation of the syncretism taking place in the Americas, and originating in Cuzco, reflecting a balance that came of the intellectual struggle between two cultures fighting for ideological domination over the region. The expression of feelings and ideas gives rise to a historical narrative born of the result of the collision and linking up of two opposing worlds that came together in a startling artform.

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Figure 1. Basilio Santa Cruz Pumacallao, *St. Lawrence*, c. 1680-1720. Museo Pedro de Osma, Peru



Figure 2a. Basilio Santa Cruz Pumacallao, *St. Lawrence* (detail). Museo Pedro de Osma, Peru

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Figure 2b. *Investiture of St. Ildephonsus* (detail)